

# BOTTLE IMP

*A diabolic trick-taking card game for three to four players aged 10 years or up.*

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## GAME CONTENTS:

- 36 suit cards: (12 each of blue, red and yellow suits) They are consecutively numbered 1 to 37 with the exception of 19 (see below). The coins between the numerals indicate the point value of the card for scoring at the end of the hand.
  - 1 start value card (= 19)
  - 1 Bottle Imp card
  - 4 reference cards
  - these instructions
- \* In addition paper and pencil are needed to record points.

Before we continue, just a few words on the Ownership of the Bottle “*Of glass it is but the glass of it was tempered in the flames of hell. An imp lives in it, and that is the shadow we behold there moving: or so I suppose. If any man buy this bottle the imp is at his command; all that he desires - love, fame, money, houses like this house ... - all are his at the word uttered ... There is one thing the imp cannot do - he cannot prolong life; and, it would not be fair to conceal from you, there is a drawback to the bottle; for if a man die before he sells it, he must burn in hell forever ... it cannot be sold at all, unless sold at a loss. If you sell it for as much as you paid for it, back it comes to you again like a homing pigeon ... Only remember it must be coined money that you sell it for ...*”

## ABOUT THE GAME

As with many other trick-taking card games, the idea of The Bottle Imp is to acquire the most points. The Bottle Imp makes trumps out of the lowest cards. The player with the highest card less than the price of the Bottle earns the trick and also the bottle imp card. Then the price of the Bottle falls to that of the winning card.

In this way the owner of the Bottle Imp changes until its value can no longer be undercut. Whoever has the Bottle Imp at the end of the hand earns negative points instead of positive ones.



## PREPARATION

The start value card (no. 19) and the Bottle Imp card are placed face up on the table. This is the current price of the Bottle Imp.

Each player is given a reference card. They show the distribution of the colors and numbers on the cards.



The remaining 36 playing cards are dealt evenly to the players. In receiving the cards it is recommended that the players sort them by number, rather than color.

## BEGINNING THE GAME

Each player discards a card. The discarded card is placed face down as the Imp's Trick under the start value card (no. 19). No one may look at these cards. Each player exchanges a card face down with both of his neighbors. First he passes a card from his hand to his left hand neighbor, then one to his right hand neighbor. Finally he takes the two cards which are lying before him (from his neighbors) into his hand.

## Trick-Taking

Play proceeds clockwise. The player to the left of the dealer begins by playing a card. Whatever color has been played, the other players must follow suit. If a player cannot follow suit he may play any card.

If all of the played cards are numbered higher than the current value of the Bottle Imp, the player who played the highest numbered card, regardless of whether he followed suit, wins the trick. The player who wins the trick will be the next one to lead the trick.

## The Bottle Imp

The Bottle Imp can always be re-sold as long as the price is lower than the last price.

If only one player plays a card whose number is lower than the current price of the Bottle Imp, then the Bottle Imp automatically transfers to its new owner at the end of the trick. That player takes the Bottle Imp card from the middle of the table, or from another player if applicable, and places it in front of him. He also places the card that won the trick face up on top of the Bottle Imp card to indicate that this is the new current price of the Bottle Imp.

If more than one player plays a card with numbers lower than the current price of the Bottle Imp, then the player who played the highest such card (the one closest to the current price) receives the trick and the Bottle Imp card. The card that won the trick is placed face up on top of the Bottle Imp card, becoming the new current price of the Bottle Imp. That player is also now the current owner of the Bottle Imp.

The card which denoted the previous price of the Bottle Imp goes to the Bottle's former owner. He turns it over and adds it to any other cards he has won. It is possible that the new and former owners of the Bottle Imp are identical.

Also note: you never take the 19 card and the cards under it. Those are for the Bottle Imp owner at the end of the game.

### AN EXAMPLE:

It is the start of the game and no one owns the Bottle. The value of the Bottle Imp is 19. The following cards are played: Adam: 24, Betty: 15, Christian: 17, Doris: 32.

Adam and Doris played cards above 19 while Betty and Christian played cards lower than 19. Of the latter two, Christian's 17 is higher than 15 - and closer to 19. So Christian gets the trick and also the Bottle Imp card. He does not take the 19 card and those cards under it. The new price of the Bottle Imp is 17. The 17 card is placed in front of Christian, face up on top of the Bottle Imp card. Christian will lead the next trick.



### END OF THE HAND

When all the cards have been played, each player receives points equal to the number of coins found on the cards in his pile of tricks won.

**Exception:** the player who owns the Bottle Imp at the end of the hand, instead of scoring positive points, receives only the total number of coins found in the Imp's Trick (those cards under the 19 card) as **negative** points (a player can fall below zero points in this way). The owner of the Bottle Imp ignores the cards in his pile of tricks won!

After a pre-arranged number of hands or reaching an agreed point total (e.g. 200 points), the player with the highest point total wins.

## STRATEGY HINTS

### Discarding and Passing

In general it is a good idea to pass the lowest cards to one's neighbors. Vital game information is also passed with every exchanged card. For example, if a player receives the 1 card, the game is lost if another player succeeds in taking the Bottle Imp with the 2 unless the player can manage to play the 1 in the same trick or earlier.

It is also a good idea to void oneself of one suit because one has more options to play in a trick. Therefore you should plan to pass low cards of the same color. But this can backfire as you might get passed a low yellow card.

### Card Play

One should promptly play the cards whose values are slightly under the starting price, in order to win cards with high value. Once the price of the Bottle has been lowered, this is no longer possible.

In order not to receive and keep the Bottle Imp at the end of the game, try to play the very lowest numbers as favorably as possible. That can be done most safely when cards of higher number that are below the Bottle Imp price have already been played in the trick.

It is enticing, but also risky, to play a high point card into a (apparently) "normal" trick. For example if one takes the 31 with the 37, the next player could take the trick (together with the Bottle Imp) by playing a very low card.